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THE 20,000 CLERGY
AND
THE PRESENT CRISIS.



R. F. HESSEY.





*THE TWENTY THOUSAND CLERGY
AND THE PRESENT CRISIS.*

THE
Twenty Thousand Clergy
AND THE
Present Crisis,
OR
THE PASTOR IN HIS PARISH DEALING WITH
INFIDELITY.

BY THE
REV. R. F. HESSEY, M.A.
VICAR OF BASING, HANTS,
FORMERLY FELLOW AND TUTOR OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
THE LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER,
WHOSE DEEPLY-VALUED WORDS
HAVE,
WITH HIS KIND APPROBATION,
BEEN PREFIXED,
THIS LITTLE WORK
IS DEDICATED,
WITH THE SINCEREST RESPECT
AND REGARD.

P R E F A C E .

ERRATUM.

MY attention has been drawn by my friend Canon I. Gregory Smith, at whose kind invitation I addressed the Clergy, to the fact that I have inadvertently described the address as delivered "to the Clergy of the Rural Deanery of Great Malvern," instead of "at an Ember Conference of Clergy in Great Malvern."



P R E F A C E .

THE following is the substance of an Address delivered to the Clergy of the Rural Deanery of Great Malvern, and, since then, committed to paper, in an enlarged and more developed form.

The writer was encouraged by the kind attention which the thoughts then put forth received, to hope, that the attempt, however unworthily carried out, might, by God's blessing, do something to meet a need, which he may be mistaken in feeling is a real one.

In the same spirit in which, with a sincere sense of his shortcomings, he commended his effort to those who then heard him, he ventures to address the large and influential body, whose vast responsibilities he shares.

FARNHAM CASTLE,

Dec. 7th, 1882.

My dear Mr. Hessey,

I have read with the utmost interest your able and eloquent address on "The Twenty Thousand Clergy and the present Crisis." I hope it will be widely circulated, and produce a great and lasting effect.

It will, I fear, be difficult to get 20,000 men able to meet all the intellectual difficulties which at this time present themselves even to very simple minds; for it does not require much learning or wisdom to find puzzles, though it may need both to solve them. Still I hope that appeals like yours may awaken in many the conviction that a great responsibility rests on all of us to be "ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us," and to be able to enter into the difficulties and perplexities of anxious souls.

I am, ever,

My dear Mr. Hessey,

Most truly yours,

E H. WINTON.

THE REV. R. F. HESSEY.

THE TWENTY THOUSAND CLERGY AND THE PRESENT CRISIS.

MY BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY,

It has been a deep privilege to me to have been allowed to join with you in your devotions of this day.

And now I am called upon to try, as God shall give me power, to speak a word in season upon a matter of the most surpassing moment.

Believe me, my brethren, nothing but the gravity and unspeakable importance of the crisis, would have led me to venture to choose, for the address of this day, a subject which many of those present must be far more competent to treat of than myself. I may count, I feel sure, upon your kind forbearance, as I endeavour to deal with so difficult a question.

Now I was led to shape our enquiry into the present form, viz : "the duty of the Clergy in their parishes in reference to the infidelity of the present day," by what occurred some time ago at a Diocesan Conference at which I was present. Much was said about the tremendous nature of the crisis, and about the



urgent necessity for speedy action, but when methods and means of meeting that emergency were being suggested, hardly any count was made of the twenty thousand Clergy of the Church of England (to say nothing of the ministers of other denominations) numbering among their ranks hundreds of men of culture, training, vigour, and adaptability, combined with earnest and fervent zeal for the kingdom of the Redeemer.

Are these twenty thousand Clergy to be cast aside as useless? Is *their* influence to be rejected? Are *they* unable to cope with the growing evil? and are we to wait for the slow and deliberate process of the training of a new order of missionaries around us, before we can begin to make a serious attack upon the infidel outworks that are daily growing in strength? In the name of Him, who would have the Gospel preached to every creature, let immensely enlarged lay agency be immediately adopted for the peculiar nature of the conflict, but don't forget the tried and loyal regular army, accustomed to fighting for their King, and longing, if some one did but press it upon them, to do more battle in His cause.

Yes, that thought, "press it upon them!" Therein, if I mistake not, lies the root of the matter. And is it presumptuous if I venture to remind those who hear *me*, of the *gigantic* dimensions of the impending evil,

or point to the shadows that are hourly lengthening, and to the ominous tokens of a night of irreligion settling down upon our land ?

For, look you, infidelity in the present day has entered upon quite a new phase. It no longer speaks with bated breath. It no longer tries to hide a front which it might fear that others, at least, would be ashamed of. I remember, when I was a child, the sort of stigma and horror that attached to the name of an infidel. And even after all that lapse of time, I seem to link the idea of infidelity with one especial name, coming up from those old days.

But now the rejection of Christianity is no longer a matter of disrepute.

*“Parva metu primo ; mox sese attollit in auras,
Ingrediturque solo, et caput inter nubila condit.”*

Not so long ago it was only the “Westminster Review,” and one or two other periodicals that sustained an unfashionable and unpopular cause ; but now, in the “Nineteenth Century,” for instance, (I single out this as a novel phenomenon, and not necessarily as censuring its method) may be found side by side with the writings of devoted believers in Christianity, the most unflinching advocacy of atheistic or agnostic thought. Nay, further, these very utterances of indifference or hostility to Christ, have every chance of the very widest

audience, when such literature as I have mentioned is admitted without check or warning to our reading rooms, our book societies, and our drawing room tables.

Lacordaire, in speaking of that insane and fearful utterance of Voltaire's, which I shudder even to take within my lips, ventured upon the assertion that "that phrase had not strength enough to pass the bounds of the century in which it was uttered, that it halted tremblingly on the frontiers of our own, and since then no human voice, even amongst those which are not respected, has dared to repeat that signal of impious revolt." And yet I know not whether these last days cannot parallel such an insensate outbreak.

But apart from this, you note that the whole atmosphere is charged with these new speculations. Our literature is tinged with them; nay, our very Universities too faithfully reflect the general disorder and rudderless condition of religious thought.

And then there is another feature in the present anomalous state of things. In the last century the profession of Deism was often associated with a low moral standard; but now the upholders of even the most advanced forms of unbelief are oftentimes men of the most irreproachably blameless lives. Not that we forget for a moment that there is a connection *between doubt and sin*, and that doubt *in some sort*

is sin ; (as our dear Lord says : “ Of sin because they believe not on Me ;”) and that when the sympathetic soul ought loyally to recognize the revelation of the God-Man, Christ becomes, so to speak, as one has put it, “ the touchstone of character.”

And yet, who is he that should dare to cast a stone at the earnest and conscientious doubter, as though he himself were necessarily on a higher platform than such an inquirer ? “ Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,” such an one “ at last may beat his music out,” (as that deep thinker among poets has it,) and there may be more faith in his “ honest doubt,” than in many another’s formal profession of, or inherited conformity to, a faultless creed, which fails to influence or permeate his life. Perchance *we* err and stray far more guiltily in many another point, than such an one may be doing in the particular matter of religious perplexity,

Ah ! my friends, we never make a greater mistake than when we draw harsh and disparaging conclusions concerning those, who, in matters connected with religion, have not been able to see their way. I do like that sonnet of Charles Turner, a worthy echo of his greater brother’s thought :

“ I tax not all with this unmanly hate
Of truth, for purer spirits stand without,
Meek men of reverent purpose watch and wait,
And gaze in sorrow from the land of doubt

Yes—gentle souls there be, who hold apart,
And long in silence for the day of grace ;
For deep in many a brave, though bleeding heart,
There lurks a yearning for the Healer's face.'

And then there is another feature, even more important and significant than those I have mentioned. Everybody remembers how, in that famous letter of Pliny to Trajan, belonging so to speak to the archives of our Christianity, the writer, after speaking of the converts to the new faith being drawn alike "from all ages and ranks, and from either sex," remarks further that it was not merely the towns that were infected, but the outlying hamlets and rural districts. "Neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est." That which Pliny remarked of the way in which the new "superstition," as he called it, was penetrating and leavening that portion of the population which it might least be expected to reach, is becoming true to a certain extent of something more rightly to be called a "superstition," for oftentimes none are so superstitious and credulous, as those who imagine they have emancipated themselves from the restraint of a creed.

We must not exaggerate the state of the case, and it is easy to do so, but we shall be sadly out in our *reckoning* if we imagine that the infidel "contagion "

of our towns and centres of thought, has not spread among our villages. We must not forget that the work of indoctrination is silently going on through the myriads of newspapers, which penetrate almost to the lowest stratum, and which are the self-adopted teachers of the fifty per cent. who, it is understood, never attend any place of public worship whatever ; to say nothing of the sway they are exercising over those who are nominally attached to some body of professing worshippers. A significant and deeply important fact, this !

Many causes have concurred to loosen the hold of Christianity upon the working classes. Not to speak now of the lack of adaptability and flexibility in the manner of our services, to the Procrustean bed of which, the untrained mind refuses oftentimes to submit itself.

And yet I cannot help just alluding to this. For it is a very heavy indictment against the Church of England, that, whilst occupying its Clergy almost all Sunday long with the ministration of services framed for the needs of the full-grown Christian, it practically leaves them no energy or appliances, for seeking those who are lost upon the mountains "in the cloudy and dark day."

Why should it not be possible, at least, occasionally, when there are millions not brought in, for

the anxious yearning pastor to go upon his errand of finding the lost ones, (upon the only day, perchance, when they can be found,) leaving some deacon (I am thinking of a vastly enlarged order of deacons) or, it may be, some authorized lay reader, to conduct the devotions of the professed believers, without invading the functions of those in full Orders ?

My heart aches when I think of the fearful waste of power which our unbending act of uniformity involves, and which the portioning out of the flock of Christ in such fashion that the abounding energy of one should have only a charge of some few souls to minister to, (precious indeed, and yet not calling for *so much* nurture, when others have *none*,) while thousands have to look in vain to the efforts of some single-handed worker, zealous it may be, and Christ-loving, but utterly unable to cope with his task, even while in full vigour, still less, when infirmity creeps on. Quousque tandem ? And how is the noblest Church in Christendom crippled by such grievous and blighting anomalies !

I might allude to that lack of vivid heart-to-heart and eye-to-eye utterance, which is so often caused by written sermons, or (where extempore address is not possible) by manuscript that has not got right down into the heart of the preacher, before it is read *from the pulpit*. And I might point out to some, who

have not chanced to remark it, the extraordinary oversight which places the morning service in a country village, at the squire's hour, and not the poor man's. (How such an arrangement can have gone on so long, I can't imagine.) Or I might draw attention to the unjust, and inconsiderate, and unhistorical, and unscriptural system, which has robbed the working man of his equal rights in God's House.

But these are not the only causes of the partial defection, if such is the case, of the working classes from Christianity. The change in the relations of employer and employed, the severance of the educated and uneducated classes, theories about the opposition between Christianity and social progress, divisions and dissensions in the Christian camp—all this, added to a dull and unexplained doubt about the bearing of science and history upon religion and scripture, has often tended to induce in the working man, if not infidelity, at least indifference and apathy.

Have I given the facts rightly? Is not this something like the true state of the case? Pardon me, if, in my desire to bring clearly out the nature of the problem, I have seemed to trespass too long upon your patience. I will only say for myself, that an almost elaborate setting forth of the details of the difficulty, seems in a manner necessary to help one to realize the exact nature of the required remedy.

You will say, what is the remedy that you propose? Are we to be drawn into an arena of public discussion? Is there to be platform advocacy of our most Holy Faith? And are arguments to be bandied to and fro by combatants, who in the heat of the conflict are liable to care more for victory than for truth? And are we to expect that the witnesses of the fence shall appreciate, with unbiassed mind, the relation of the intellectual handling of the arguments, to the real issue at stake? For, indeed, one might remark further, that, (as Bishop Ellicott acutely observes in one of the essays in the volume of the Christian Evidence Society on "Modern Scepticism,") "even in minds of higher strain, there is often a secret sympathy with the attacking party, not so much on the merits of the case, as from the simple fact that it *is* the attacking party, and that, while on this side there is only the passivity of prescription, on the other there is all the vigour of assault and progress."

No; I do *not* suggest, except under peculiar circumstances, the doubtful expedient of public disputation. It is a very different suggestion that, with all humility and deep deference, I have to offer to my brethren of the Clergy.

Don't you remember how George Herbert speaks of the pulpit of the Country Parson as "his joy and *his throne*," and there are other words of Erasmus

which speak of him as then "in the very height of his dignity, when from the pulpit he feeds the Lord's flock with sacred doctrine," and it has been further remarked that the pulpit was mainly instrumental, under God, in carrying through the Reformation. In that sphere then, lies, in my apprehension, one special department of the duty and opportunity of the 20,000 clergy, in reference to this unparalleled emergency.

What, you exclaim, is the pulpit to be sacrificed to barren disquisitions, which may produce the very reverse of the effect desired? Are there to be arid tractates upon the being of a God, for instance, which may leave the mind of the uncultured listener in such a hopeless state of confusion, that all he might realize would be, that arguments had been brought forward by the preacher to prove that there was *no* God, but that he, for his part, believed there *was* a God, whatever the parson might say. Everybody knows that traditional story. But it is really a typical one. For it is by no means an imaginary case, that clumsy handling of religious difficulties often creates or aggravates, instead of removing them.

No, we have not yet arrived at the real use of the pulpit in this matter.

The pastor's work will rather be done, not by doubtful disputations, but 1st, by calm, quiet, uncontroverted laying down of the grounds upon which our

faith rests ; 2ndly, by incidentally, and rather by illustration than argument, removing obstacles from the path of belief ; 3rdly, by adducing instances of men to whose judgment the hearers would defer, and whose deliberate verdict has been in favour of Christianity.

Perhaps as a preparation for the quiet, uncontroversial statement of the bases of religious belief, it may sometimes not be unseasonable to give, in such fashion as would commend itself to uncultivated and common-sense hearers, the natural history of unbelief.

It is a maxim with Englishmen that nobody should be condemned unheard, or without a fair trial, and no one who has a spark of reasonableness in him, decides a question without hearing both sides. If people acted in this way, half the attacks upon the Bible would be dismissed at once as unreasonable, and the remaining arguments against the truth of Scripture might disappear upon careful enquiry. But this is not the way in which people always act in reference to religion.

A child is brought up believing the Bible to be true, and knowing that he must live a holy and good life. But with growing years, temptations grow ; and there is an increasing disinclination to restraint of any kind (it is the old parable of the Father forsaken,) and with the revulsion from restraint comes the *willingness to find that* the law of God is not binding, and the

mind is open to any suggestion, from any quarter whatsoever, that the Scripture is not true.

Then comes the critical time. He reads infidel books or hears infidel talk, and he has only a child's knowledge of what Scripture really is, wherewith to meet the objections to Scripture. What does he do? Instead of deepening his knowledge of the Bible, and ascertaining for himself what the Book has to say for itself, and what credentials of its truth God has given; he is more interested to know what others will say against it, for that will justify to his mind his continuing to desert its holy requirements. So he reads book after book, written by the opponents of Christianity, flattering himself that he is quite open to conviction, simply an earnest and candid enquirer, while, all the while, he is deserting the first principles of common honesty and straight-forwardness.

You see he is bribed, *οὐ γὰρ ἀδέκαστοι κρίνομεν*, by his evil desires, and by his wish for an unholy freedom and independence, to endeavour to prove, without possibility of contradiction, that the Bible *must* be false. And, as he chooses to shut his eyes to the truth, so there is a self-induced impossibility of recognizing that truth.

Could it be otherwise, you will say, after such an unfaithful dealing with evidence? Shall God be mocked thus wantonly without fearful self-caused consequences to the mocker? Shall He supply credentials to the

truth of His having spoken to men, so plain, that he who runs may read them, if he only cares to cast his eyes in that direction, and shall His arrogant creature dare to let those credentials remain unheeded, or expect, without an hour's patient enquiry, to understand the nature and bearing of those credentials? For the mere following up of prepossessions against revealed religion, by reading reiterated attacks upon it, is the very reverse of patient enquiry, the very idlest and most blameworthy exercise of misdirected powers. Evil passions have led the way, and a prostituted reason has justified the course.

Would not such an analysis of the growth of free thought, falsely so called, and of the hold that infidel opinions may get upon a man, illustrating as it does, man's "loving darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil," in contrast to that consoling truth, that "if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God"—would not this, I say, (laid simply down, here a little and there a little,) be a fitting preparation for the calm setting forth of what have seemed to my judgment, by God's grace, after careful enquiry of many years, some of the irresistible and impregnable evidences of our Faith.

And because, if we can marshal the evidences into a series, they seem to strike the mind more forcibly, *one might*, for instance, shape into a course four

different witnesses, somewhat after this fashion :—

There would first be “The witness of the Prophets to Christ.” Their witness to His Godhead would be accredited by their “certain prediction of what Divine wisdom alone could know, and Divine power could alone accomplish.” Thus accredited, whatever they state or imply concerning the Divinity of the Messiah, would have the weight of a Divine announcement ; and the witness of the prophets concerning the coming Great One, would be a trustworthy and authoritative, “Behold your God !”

Next, like deep answering to deep, would come “The witness of the Apostles to Christ ;” that witness, confirmed by the seal of their own suffering, attested by the unanimity of their varying report, carrying, by their simple self-forgetfulness, the conviction that they had been guided into all truth, and by their unique representation of the sinless One, that all things had been brought to their remembrance. Their witness would be as a voice proclaiming to past ages, which had “waited for the Salvation,” and to a more blessed generation whose eyes had seen it, that “this is our God, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation.”

And then would come “The witness of History to Christ ;” the myriad harmonious voices of the ages, pointing with unerring certainty to the alone cause,

ghastly story which the revealed city of Pompeii discloses, and which confirms only too forcibly, (if confirmation were needed,) the terrible indictment by the Apostle to the Romans; and after shewing how the unfruitful rules of a few wiser heathen could not lift up those, whom a corrupted religion (for men become like the objects that they worship) or the rejection of *all* religion, had so fearfully debased—one might point out how the religion of Jesus substituted for an unholy allegiance to devils, a living faith in an All-holy God, revealed in connection with Perfect Manhood, and gave a motive and a vitality to precepts which were utterly barren and powerless before.

What says our heart to all this? Does not the Man of sorrows, hanging upon the tree, and the thought that that Man of sorrows is very God, bring out to us in a way that nothing else could, the nature of that alienation from God, which is sin? And does not the thought of such a sacrifice make repentance possible, by the felt possibility of forgiveness? Further, does not the realization of such amazing love quicken the conscience with the sense of obligation, correct the imagination by interposing the thought of the spotless Lamb, and move us onward, in imitation of Him, to all love towards others?

Yes, this is the fruit of the coming of Christ, and

how much more? But would such fruit have been possible, if He, who is the centre of all this, had been *not* God, but *only* man? Not so. But, being Himself very God, He carried up all the adoration and love with which He had bound the heart of mankind to Himself, into the bosom of our Father, which is in Heaven, and as the second Person in the Adorable Trinity, linked it with the Eternal Godhead.

Who art Thou, O Jesu, that restorest our soul, that leadest us forth in the paths of righteousness? Yes, indeed, Thou art rightly called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

In all that I have said thus far, no controversy need be introduced. It would come out in a quiet meditative view of the evidences of a creed, of which we are not supposed to be in doubt, but for which it is a great comfort to find that there are such solid intellectual grounds. It speaks not so much to a dissatisfied intellect, as to an intellect that, without such grounds, may become dissatisfied.

Next, I would touch upon the way in which difficulties or fallacies may be removed incidentally, by means of illustration. The story of Zaleucus, and his reconciliation of justice and mercy, by sharing, with his son, who had violated the law, the penalty which he had enacted for such violation, will in some sort

illustrate the method of the Divine economy by which mercy and truth met together. The penalty of the offender was to be the loss of both his eyes. The righteous father deprived himself of the sight of one of his own, that justice might have its full course, and yet the dictates of mercy might be regarded. In the son thus lovingly dealt with, the sense of the heinousness of his guilt would not be weakened, while his gratitude towards so self-sacrificing a parent would enkindle a deeper unwillingness to offend one, who had showed Himself so tender, so compassionate, so good. Here we have the relation of God in Christ towards his guilty child, man, not sparing the very eye of his life, His own dear Son, but freely yielding Him up, that He might be just, and yet justify the ungodly. See "Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation," Religious Tract Society.

And then, another illustration will deal with the objection, "Why should the innocent suffer for the guilty?" Yes, if the death of the innocent one were the death of an unwilling victim, but if He gave Himself for us, a sacrifice as willing as it was the most priceless of all, has not this act that element, which, when we find it in the world's heroes, moves us to loftiest enthusiasm? Do not

"Our hearts, with glad surprise,
To higher levels rise,"



when a Leonidas and his intrepid few glory in meeting a death that shall avert slavery from their land?

“ These were the brave, unknowing how to yield,
Who, terrible in valour, kept the field
Against their foes——

——that Greece unyoked might stand,
Nor crouch appalled beneath the tyrant’s hand.”

So runs the epitaph over other such heroes.

Or when the tale is told of how the valiant leader of the Swiss, knowing that he was rushing into the jaws of death, made a lane through the serried ranks of the Austrians, by which his followers, sprinkled with the life-blood that gushed, through a hundred wounds, from the pierced body of their champion, passed over that mangled frame (for so he willed it) to victory and liberty—do we complain of a man dying that his brethren may live? Nay, rather, such heroic acts make us glory in our common humanity. And shall not the ideal of all these acts, the death of that Brother, for those unworthy ones whom He is not ashamed to own as brethren, be counted the very supreme and topmost excellence of the God-Man, the Lord Jesus?

Or again, when, though not consciously formulated into a tangible doubt, the enigma of the Levitical economy, as it has been called, may have rested upon the mind as a sort of dead weight, what a relief may be afforded by some such clue as that supplied by that very helpful little book, just referred to, the

“Philosophy of Salvation.” That which before was an impediment in the way of belief, becomes only an additional argument for the truth of revelation, when the process of education to which the Israelitish nation was submitted, is found to be just the natural and necessary one to develop a true and working monotheism. The explanation would be given, without suggesting the difficulty to those who may not have felt it; and details and modes which might seem repugnant to reason, may be made, by a few brief hints or suggestions, to assume a Divine significance, which the hearer could not have imagined possible.

Or again, in those cases where a hasty or impatient judgment upon some passage in Scripture which may have seemed unintelligible, may have turned the mind away with a sort of repulsion from the Bible, a simple illustration of such intemperate haste, with a clear explanation of the prejudged passage, may suggest to the hearer, that a little patient enquiry would be found to remove hundreds of such difficulties. Five minutes with an ordinary commentary would at once sweep away charges of “unmeaning jargon” ignorantly or designedly brought against the Bible. Some such instances are brought home in a small book called “Infidelity, its Cause and Cure,” by the Rev. David Nelson, M.D., chapters xiii. and xvi.

And yet sometimes, when one brings out the thorough

adequacy of the Christian evidences, it may be well to point out very clearly, that intellectual conviction and a living faith are two very different things. An incident, given by the author just referred to, might be found to furnish a fitting illustration. An unbeliever, in fulfilment of a promise to a beloved wife upon her deathbed, devoted himself to the careful reading of the Bible with the help of an ordinary commentary. As a result of this reading he openly acknowledged that his doubts had been fully met. A friend, who had heard him in earlier days express his astonishment that professing Christians did not act up to their creed, (for if *he* were a believer he would certainly make it the business of his life,) was anxious to know how it fared with him, now that he was convinced of the truth of revelation; "Ah!" he exclaimed, "here is another proof of the truth of the Bible. I am going on stupidly day after day, I never would have believed, no matter who informed me of it, that I should have acted as I am now acting; I know that we are not so infatuated in other things; we do not act with this imprudence in anything else. It must be that sin has some strange effect upon the soul." Intellectual enquiry may remove obstacles from the path of faith, but it cannot give that spiritual recognition, that heart-knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has

sent, which the Saviour tells us is life eternal.

I mentioned, above, the third method by which intellectual doubt might be met, namely, the adducing instances of rulers, so to speak, in the regions of thought, whose unhesitating and deliberate verdict has been pronounced in favour of the reasonableness and the truth of Christianity.

And here the principle of "Errare malo cum Platone" comes with infinite force. We can't be far wrong if we follow in the train of a Newton, a Pascal, a Faraday, for instance. And, to some, even the testimony of one like Rousseau, who has left his mark for good or evil upon millions of his fellow-creatures, cannot be without its weight, when, after an eloquent summing up of the credentials of the Crucified One, he pursues his thought thus: "Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God. Shall we suppose the evangelic history a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction: on the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ."

And we may carry this principle of bowing to an authority that we respect, a step further still. For, if the pastor stands before his congregation, on the one hand, as a preacher of that best of sermons, which his

own holy life sets forth to his people, and therefore entirely to be trusted, and on the other, as a real living man, who has proved the difficulties, and knows what he is talking about, when he says that the evidences for our belief are in his apprehension thoroughly convincing, and that he himself is thoroughly persuaded that the foundation is a sure one—it will, then, oftentimes, need no other argument than that of his authority, to remove the doubts of those who hear. For you know that when a clergyman never tells his hearers categorically, that *he is a believer upon conviction*, those same hearers, who have, perhaps, read some cheap infidel books, or who have inhaled the infidelity that is in the air, may be inclined to make a running commentary upon the preacher's utterances, something after this fashion, "Ah, all this is very well, but if he only knew what the infidel lecturers say, he would not talk quite so unconsciously." And so his doctrine is discounted by his supposed ignorance.

You see what I mean. It is the blissful unconsciousness, as they suppose, of the preacher, that moves their spleen. What they feel they want, is one, who is

"no Sabbath drawler of old saws,
Distill'd from some worm-canker'd homily;
But spurr'd at heart with fieriest energy
To embattail and to wall about his cause
With iron-worded proof."

And though they may not need *the arguments*, they want to feel that they have *the man*.

I cannot too emphatically repeat, that nothing, but the full setting forth of the Everlasting Gospel, and its entrance into, and acceptance by, the answering heart, through the spirit of the living God, will make a man a true Christian. But when doubt and difficulty are barring the way, it may first be necessary, as a condition of that entrance and acceptance, that the stone should have been rolled away from the door of the heart ; God's grace, in this matter also, working with man's intelligence.

So much, with deepest humility, with reference to the function of the pulpit. There yet remains a private sphere of personal intercourse, in which, if I mistake not, a most effective and deep-reaching work may be accomplished. Take a country parish, for instance. The great majority of the parish may be of the labouring class, or of a class at any rate possessed of but little culture. Well, then, after the preacher, not blindly insensible to the currents of thought and feeling among the masses, has seemed to himself to have dealt with their supposed difficulties according to the measure of their requirements, there may yet remain a class, numerically small, which may seem to demand a different treatment. There will be the squire and others in a similar position, whose doubts

may remain quite unmet by the Pastor's public utterances.

Is it an unusual case that the clergyman, through diffidence of his own acquirements, through a modest anxiety, lest his own slender attainments should seem unworthy of his high calling and responsibility, or, it may possibly be, through a sort of false shame, lest he should appear less omniscient than he fancies others may expect him to be—shrinks habitually from opening up those disturbing questions which some of his flock are longing to prove with him. They would give anything to know what he *really* thinks of those half-admitted conclusions which are sapping the strength of their own belief, and how his faith can be so strong in that atmosphere of doubt, which has almost killed the sickly plant of their own faith; how, in short, he reconciles the ancient creed with propositions which they cannot deny, and which seem completely antagonistic to it. He reads, they say, the same books as we do, he thinks the same thoughts. What is the elixir of life that gives vitality to his trust in a loving Heavenly Father, in an All-sufficient Saviour?

What a support to such an one would it be, if, disarmed by the persuasion that his doubts will not be supposed to be part and parcel of a thoroughly tainted mind, he should be emboldened to open out his whole case to a sympathising friend. Such the pastor ought

to be *felt* to be. And conceive the bracing effect, if that friend could say to him, for instance, "I have read Renan, and a more baseless creation could not be conceived. I have searched into those questions (mentioning them to him) which are causing you such anxiety. I have faced those spectres of the mind which to you are waking and influential realities. 'Supernatural Religion' I have not read, but I remember how the learned Bishop of Winchester remarks that the author of that book may be regarded as having done good service to Christianity by rousing the peaceful spirit of Professor (now Bishop) Lightfoot, to do battle for the truth, and to prove beyond all reasonable and honest doubt that the books of the New Testament are the productions of those who were themselves eye-witnesses of the events of which they tell."

And then the calm and quiet communing together, as of two fellow enquirers who have one object in common, neither of them afraid of research, each feeling assured that, if nature and revelation are by the same Divine Author, they cannot be found to be ultimately discordant; the one not arguing for conquest, and with no thought of self, but simply to help his fellow to share his own assured hope; the other willing to be overcome, if his being vanquished, means *truth prevailing*;—how good will all this be! And

as the pastor deals with his friend's doubts, it will perhaps be as one, who has himself been, like Dante, "in hell." ("Eccovi l'uom ch'è stato all' inferno," as Carlyle reminds us the people of Verona used to say of the author of *The Inferno*) and who knows by terrible experience the "de Profundis" of the travelling soul.

Is his friend perplexed with the seemingly impenetrable mystery of pain? Perhaps he may find for him a solution, in the dignity of the human spirit, in the vastness of eternal interests, in the all-sufficing greatness of the infinite God. Is he troubled by the apparent incompatibility between the fixity of law, and the possible answer to prayer? He may suggest with Professor McCosh, "on the Divine Attributes," "that the answer to prayer proceeds on the foreseen circumstance that the prayer will be offered, and that if a man refuses to pray, he shall assuredly find it fixed that no answer is given;" and that, "should a further reply be insisted on, it is enough to shew that this is a style of objection which would apply to every species of human activity."

Or, perhaps they might turn over together, with singular advantage, Sir Edmund Beckett's very instructive "Origin of the Laws of Nature."

Or, if later hypotheses are exercising a kind of glamour over him, from their seemingly all-embracing

completeness, he might, perhaps, urge with one writer, that "Evolution, from a Theistic point of view, is merely our way of describing what we observe of God's continuous action upon the physical world; and because the phrase seems tacitly or poetically to invest the universe with a power of self-unfolding, it does not follow that the question of an Intelligent Creator and Ruler, is thereby decided in the negative by those who employ it (Liddon, Elements of Religion, page 50, note). Or with another, that "all we ask is, that we may be allowed to believe in a God, and a real Divine Providence, as powerful, and wise and good as Natural Selection," (quoted by Dr. Rigg on Pantheism, in one of the volumes of the Christian Evidence Society, called "Modern Scepticism.")

And the pastor, in many an earnest talk, going back into his own history, may tell how it was not without much searching of heart, and much mental travail, and many an earnest and agonizing prayer, that he himself was led, if not to such a consummation, that

"He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,
He saw thro' his own soul.
The marvel of the everlasting will,
An open scroll,
Before him lay."

Yet to such a practical solution of the "riddle of the

painful earth," and the mystery of existence, that all perplexities,

" Which to remember only, his dismay
Renews, in bitterness not far from death,"

passed away, leaving Him "the peace of God,"

" Who leads all wanderers safe through every way."

So they may commune together, and the treasured authors that helped him in his travail, and the lightning thoughts that flashed from those clouds of difficulty, may be passed in review between the friends.

But to come to quite recent days. Perhaps he may have lying on his table the charge of the Bishop of Winchester, referred to just now, where there may be found some weighty remarks upon mistaken methods of enquiry. "Many men," he says, "let their minds dwell on the difficulties, the objections, the doubts of others. To deal first with these appears to me to be *preposterous*, in the true sense of that word, *i.e.*, beginning at the wrong end, putting the cart before the horse. Let us look for ourselves, and direct the eyes of others, to the *positive* arguments in defence of our faith." Such a suggestion as this is much needed. And he illustrates it by bringing out the fact, that, even granted, (which he would by no means allow,) that certain exaggerated and imaginary results of science and criticism, should be generally accepted, "there are strong and clear testimonials to the truth of Christian-

ity, plainly written in history and in fact, as strong, as clear, as plain, as any facts of science or criticism, by which it would be quite possible to maintain the Christian faith, if physicists and critics could do their very worst against it."

And then will come up, from his own sore experience, a warning against treating these vital questions in a half dilettanti, procrastinating manner, and forgetting that it is not safe to let things drift, (for drifting is generally down the stream,) but that the mind and will *must* address themselves unflinchingly, to the solution of the question of questions. Perhaps he may take down from his shelves "Foster on Decision of Character," and turn to the following most important caution, "Not only should thinking be reduced, by a rigid discipline, to a train in which all the parts at once depend upon, and support one another; but also this train should be followed on to a full conclusion. It should be held as an absolute law that the question *must be disposed of before it is left alone.*"

And supposing the friend, after every difficulty is removed, after every question upon the solution of which the conclusion depended, is undoubtedly disposed of, *still* feels no glow of a returning faith, no joy in a harvest of intellectual conviction, perchance this passage from "the Restoration of Belief," may *help him to see how, in the nature of the case, it can*

hardly be otherwise. Speaking of convinced enquirers, the author writes thus : " Nevertheless, it is true that such readers do rise from the perusal of these books, confusedly convinced, and not fairly or finally rid of their misgivings. It is to them as if infidelity had been mortally wounded, and lay at their feet as dead, but the carcase has not been removed or buried out of their sight ; and they eye it with dread, as expecting its resurrection. They have concerned themselves, with *negations*, they have carried *their eye too close* to the object before them, they have failed to come into correspondence with what is *positive* in the Gospel, they have lost, or not yet acquired, sympathy with that in it, which to those who occupy a better position, is *seen* to be great, is *felt* to be true, is *found* to be real."

For, often, when all has been gone through, the real cumulative force of converging lines of enquiry is not *felt*, however satisfactorily it may have been arrived at, and nothing but *at once* acting upon the adequately ascertained truths, nothing but faithfully and wisely *daring* to close the discussion, when it ought to be closed, can restore the true perspective to the eye of the soul. As that deep thinker, Pascal, puts it in his " Thoughts on Religion : " " It is true that we ought not to begin with custom in our enquiries after truth ; but we must have recourse to it when once we have

discovered where truth is, in order to refresh and invigorate our belief, which every passing hour inclines us to forget ; for *a regular train of arguments cannot always be present to our minds.*" And this last important observation goes to explain, further, the need of avoiding procrastination, mentioned by Foster. For in probable evidence the force of each separate item of argument ought not to be permitted, by too long an interval, to lose its due share of influence upon the heart and will.

And then, as the two confer together, there lacks not courage to press the matter home, and to bid him, whose religious life has become gradually paralyzed by doubt, to throw himself into the very completest relation to the Lord of life ; till, with St. Augustine, he can exclaim : " O Lord, I am Thy servant and the son of Thy handmaid, Thou hast broken my bonds in sunder. Let my heart, and my tongue, and all my bones say, Lord, who is like unto Thee ? and do Thou answer me, and say to my soul, I am Thy salvation."

And yet, perhaps, there is still hesitation and a lingering doubt of his true conviction. " Can I," he still says, " ought I, to take to myself the full Christian's word of prayer, and the ripe result of confirmed faith ?" And with the fervent grasp of the hand at parting, *perhaps* " *Lead kindly light*" comes to the lips of the

pastor, with some such sustaining words as these (a counsel that can never come amiss) "Act up to all the light that you have, with prayer to the Father of lights, for more light, for in no other way will light dawn upon your soul."

But I seem to hear someone suggesting that all this presupposes too much in the intellectual history and capacity of the pastor. All may not have had the same personal need or opportunity for enquiry. All may not have equal ability to grapple with multiform doubt. But all should "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear," and in points where independent enquiry is not feasible, a clergyman should be able to point to a trustworthy authority. Any way, the man must be complete as far as he goes. He must know where he is, and what he is about. And it is the feeling that it is so with their pastor, that will give confidence to the flock. Nay, even though no categorical answer be supplied, the very unburdening of the mind to a sympathising friend, may "make daylight in the understanding," as Bacon has it, "out of darkness and confusion of thoughts." For it is very true, as he quaintly puts it, "that a man were better relate himself to a statua or a picture than to suffer his thoughts to pass in smother." Ah! how many are there whose minds are "fraught

with many thoughts," and who just want that "communication and discoursing with another," to make "their wits and understanding clarify and break up."

I remember reading an incident of opportunities of influence neglected, which might have a much larger application, than to clergy in relation to their flocks. A young man had a fellow-student pulling in the same boat with him, "so runs the round of life from hour to hour," whom he never could bring himself to speak an earnest word to, because he seemed so set against Christ, and all thoughts of religion. Years afterwards, he was surprised, when meeting that man, who had since been ordained, to hear from him how, all the while, when he thought it would be no good speaking, the man had been longing for just a sympathising word from him, and wondering why it was never spoken.

But, if what I have said about the crust of reserve is true of our dealings with those of higher culture, no less does it apply to our relation to those in a different position in life. How potent will be the openness that begets openness, the brotherhood that invites friendly feeling, the grasp of the hand that tells of the common heart of humanity, the spontaneous effort to understand, and enter into, the current fallacies in the popular mind.

But here the pastor's shrinking back is even

greater, for fear his incomplete knowledge should be construed by the working man into an argument for the clergyman's belief being (what it certainly is not), merely an official one; and from the nature of the difficulties being such, (if they are to be directly answered), as to involve a larger special knowledge than their questioners perhaps possess. But what does all this mean, but that a little pains should be taken to marshal evidences according to their relative importance; and to know those points which are really necessary for a practical working ground of belief. And here, oftentimes, with the working man as with many another, it is not so much that they want to search out things for themselves, as to feel satisfied that *you* have done so *for yourself*. And how can they know that you know, unless you tell them that you do? And how can they feel satisfied with your telling them this, unless they have the outward signs of a true, living man, and not a mere official perfunctory person? But for all this to be possible, we must buckle to, to meet the necessities of the case. There must be the girding up the loins of our mind, for what, to many, will be a most distasteful task.

For it is distressing for men who believe in a Saviour, to have to enter upon enquiries, in which, from the very nature of the case, the Divinity of that Saviour is for the moment an open question; to have

to revive speculations which may have been long laid aside, and to change, though but for a moment, the attitude of devout prayer, and reverent adoration, for the balancing of probabilities, and the weighing of evidence. It is distressing, for, however truly the soul may retain its allegiance, yet the very act of enquiring into the existence of that by which we consciously live, produces that false perspective of which we spoke just now. And even the very act of enquiring for others has a tendency to bring back that sort of chaos, which perhaps, in the days when we were enquiring for ourselves, preceded the dawning of the light. And perhaps, we fear lest that confusion should prevail again in our minds. But I remember some one, who was willing to be blotted out of God's book, if only the people whom he led could be spared. And I bethink me of another, who could even endure to be accursed from Christ, if only his brethren could be saved. And shall not a little risk of discomfort, or distress, or even worse than that, be welcomed by him, who to rescue his flock from peril, must incur somewhat of peril himself.

And yet to whom can the peril be less, than to the pastor? For, look you, is he not in the path of duty pledged as he is, to "be ready with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and *strange* doctrines contrary to God's Word"? and surely

angels will have charge to keep him. And to whom ought it to be more safe to engage in such enquiries, than to one, who, committed to holiness by his very profession, might seem as little liable as any, to have his judgment biassed by his lower inclinations?

And still a further thought seems to emerge. If the fidelity of the officers is corrupted, how shall it fare with the issue of the battle? For a battle there shall be, nay, is already, and that battle is between the mightiest civilizer of the world, the revelation of the God-Man, and the forces of anarchy and confusion; between that, which alone can save man from himself, and the surging upward of the baser instincts! And how if the fire and enthusiasm of the leaders is damped by hesitation as to the righteousness and holiness of their cause?

For is there not a danger to us, my brethren of the clergy, lest, reading incautiously, and with no sufficient safeguard or antidote, the falsely free-thinking literature of the present day, the balance of our judgment, in matters of religion, should, unconsciously to ourselves almost, become false, simply because we have not observed that there has been gradual accretion of matter upon one of the scales in which we weigh the evidence in question? For, to take another figure, as he would be but a foolhardy person, who should adventure himself where infection

was rife, without the due use of disinfectants, if such could be had, so *he* would not be greatly to be admired, who, imagining himself in spiritual matters to bear a charmed existence, should let a vitiated atmosphere of infidelity, attack unheeded the springs of his religious life. For to recall the old Socratic figure, the mind is not like an earthen pitcher in which deadly poisons may be carried with impunity, but a wise caution must be used, lest irreparable injury be caused. And for him who is but a novice, to play with edged tools, has always been deemed not wise. And he who seeks temptation needlessly, while he prays "not to be led into temptation," is but mocking God by such inconsistency.

Not that our religious faith is to be regarded as such a sickly plant, that it need fear every chilling blast, or that we are to be *morbidly* careful, and timidly scrupulous about every book we read. Far otherwise. But I do think that if we let our minds mix in the warfare of speculation, and it is very necessary oftentimes to do so, we should have at least some armour of proof for our protection. And even when the foundations of our faith have been firmly laid, it may be well to look occasionally to what is going on about those foundations, lest they be found to have been secretly undermined.

And here the enquiries necessary will not be so

much of that disquieting kind, of which I spoke just now, but would rather be the perusing of such books as those which the "Christian Evidence Society" has now for some years been putting forth, which, while to minds feeling after God, if haply they may find Him, or harassed with difficulties that they cannot solve, are calculated to supply just what is wanted, may afford to others, differently circumstanced, the necessary corrective, that the present state of literature requires.

And, unless I am mistaken, not a little practical help would be rendered, by the sort of running commentary upon modern infidelity, which may be found in some of the papers and discussions upon that subject, which are printed each year in the "Reports of the Church Congresses."

And yet another thought occurs to me.

It has been to the pastor in his parish, strictly so called, and to the large influence which may be exercised by him in relation to the mighty issues at present at stake, that I have sought to turn your attention this far. But there comes across me, as one, who, as Tutor of a College for many years, knew something of the religious life and thought of one of our great Universities, that in them a field of even richer promise than ever, may be found to have been opened out by changes, which at first sight might have seemed simply disastrous

It has been well remarked, that, sooner or later, Universities will be found, however closely allied externally to the Church, to reflect, more or less exactly, the religious state of the nation. And if a more open and unshrinking profession of infidelity, has obtained in many quarters outside the Universities, it is not surprising that a similar outspokenness of doubt, should prevail within the more fenced enclosure of those old religious institutions.

I know not, then, whether even positive good may not be found to result, from the removal of those outer barriers which seemed before to be the essential bulwarks of religion. The Faith was in a manner too secure in its position ; it was too much taken for granted in many places, that young men had no doubts, or only such as might be met by an ordinary routine ; and while the appointed teachers rested too much upon the ancient genius of the place, those who had no official position shrank, with an Englishman's good taste, from intruding upon the province of others. And so, while there was often an unnoticed aggression of unbelief, there was an inadequate sensitiveness or activity on the believing side. Nay, further, the necessarily indiscriminating enforcement of compliance with outward acts of religion, had a tendency still further to deaden the sensibilities, and to *provoke instead of diminishing aversion to Christianity.*

Now, however, all is changed. Religion is put upon its defence, and, being put upon its defence, it finds out how entirely adequate its intellectual and moral weapons are, and a noble enthusiasm is generated in its defenders, for a cause, which, if it be lost to the Universities, its loss is simply irreparable to the nation.

And then it is seen that there is no parish like a College, with all its appliances and opportunities, with its chapels, its traditions, its young generous life, for men of large sympathies, and burning enthusiasm, and intimate acquaintance with the movements of thought, to draw towards themselves, and inspire with their own convictions, those, who will gladly hail, when they can find them, such leaders. Here is a wonderful function for the Head of a College, be he Clergyman or Layman.

And for those, who, in the new order of things, have especially consigned to them religious offices, if they be, as they ought to be, the right men in the right place, there is a work of unequalled importance. Nay, further, when the Professoriate, by the very force of circumstances, has fresh openings and deeper duties, and when the interchange of Tutors in different colleges, gives wider scope to those who have to handle religious subjects, I can even seem almost to rejoice, that things are not as they were.

Forgive me, my brethren of the clergy, if the instincts of Alma Mater have led me to seem, though only to seem, to transgress the limits of my subject.

I should have wished to have said a word about the noble and rich future, beginning already to be realized, that, in this matter also, lies before those magnificent historical Institutions, the Cathedrals of our Land. But I must pause.

For there is yet one more danger which requires to be mentioned ; though a danger in connection with a most hopeful sign. The extraordinary successes of the Salvation Army, whatever may be thought of certain features of its doctrine or methods, bring before us this most cheering fact, that the plain and simple preaching of the Gospel to the poor, has lost none of its old power, and that the secularist efforts are very far from their desired goal. But it has been remarked in an article by Mr. M. A. Lewis, in "Macmillan's Magazine," of September, 1882, and the remark is of considerable importance, that "the Army makes no provision for the atheist, the doubter, or the enquirer." And he adduces Mr. Railton's actual words in his "Heathen England," p. 47, "an objection rarely comes from any one but a drunkard, or an infidel, to reply to either of whom would be a foolish waste of time."

If, then, it is the case that there is, from whatever

cause, a deficiency of the intellectual element in the Army, and if that is true which has been asserted, that the movement has not as yet had a perceptible influence upon the secularist camp, we ought to be warned betimes of the pressing need that there is of such a widely diffused knowledge of the rational bases of our belief, as may supply the antidote, when the first fervour of excitement is over, and intellectual doubt begins its undermining work.

And who are marked out for the van of this movement, but the twenty thousand clergy, able, so many of them, by helpful thoughts put forth, not only in such periodicals as the "Nineteenth Century," but in the penny and half-penny popular prints, the little local newspapers, and in hundreds of other ways—to prevent the cause of religion going by default, when the strain and stress comes? To whom belongs, if not to the clergy, the office of creating and sustaining *an enlightened public opinion* upon the alone sufficiency of the Christian Revelation, to meet, not only the spiritual, but also the moral and intellectual requirements of the composite being, man? Not following public opinion, but making and leading it. And "*terribly in earnest.*"

I tremble lest that singular infatuation, that extraordinary inertness, which allows a false public opinion to be gradually generated, by the millions of

tracts of the Liberation Society, concerning our Established Church of England—a false public opinion which will be followed, (if we do not bestir ourselves,) by the national disaster of its disestablishment, and disendowment, at no far distant date—I tremble, I say, lest a like infatuation should produce similar effects (unless we take good heed) in the matter of a *growing national infidelity*.

At least, such a fearful catastrophe, my brethren of the clergy, must not have to be laid at our door.

If ever there was need of a national league, it is here. Religion may prevail, though the Church may cease to be established. But how, if the foundations of religion are cast down? How, if the recognition of the living God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, no longer influence the masses?

It must not, it cannot be! God helping us by His grace, it shall not be. And yet, even if it should be, there still may be the seven thousand in Israel. Even if the sun of religion be for a time in eclipse, and night comes on, yet there are stars. And each in his place may lend a ray, to make an atmosphere of living, though more subdued light, till Faith shall once more

“Lie like a shaft of light across the land!”

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